



Glittering Embroidery of Lucknow: An overview of Zardozi Craft

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Abstract: Zardozi is a traditional embroidery since medieval period in India. It is considered to be famous embroidery of Lucknow as chikankari but zardozi is not getting as much as attention and promotion like chikankari. So this paper covers review of zardozi embroidery in historical perspective from ancient to modern period in India with special reference to Lucknow during Nawab's times. It also focuses on to find out its contemporary status, factors related to continuity and changes in the embroidery. It lays stress on the socio-economic status and problems of workers (zardoz) specially wages and health issues. This paper is a effort to fetch attention of government and non- government organizations towards this Royal craft of Lucknow for better promotion and facilities.

I. Introduction

India has a rich culture since ancient times. In Indian culture dress and ornamentation played a significant role. When we discuss about Costumes and textiles, we talk about ornamentation on clothes too. Ornamentation on costumes simply means Embroidery on clothes. The art of embroidery is clearly of Eastern origin and is of such ancient lineage that our knowledge of it stretches into pre-historic ages. The art of Embroidery has been known to India, China, Japan, Asia Minor and Arabia for centuries. Embroidery is an expression of self, rendered with patience and dedicated hard work. It is an art described as 'painting by needle'. It is a craft with a wide ranging appeal which reflects the cultural traditions of the people among whom it takes birth and develops.

India has a rich tradition of embroidery dating back to prehistoric times. In India this art takes its inspiration from nature and religion. The pattern have always been floral, animals geometric and religious. In India the art probably originated with the peasant class which has contributed the best specimens.¹ The tracts where it flourished are largely agricultural and pastoral and their inhabitants are not required to work throughout the year. They utilize spare time by devoting it to the pursuit of the art which while giving them aesthetic satisfaction brings them also a subsidiary income. Indian embroidery is a highly specialized art and calls for division of labour. It was done with only religious and royal purpose in the past. India has different forms of embroideries. Each style of embroidery is different from other and has own beauty and grace. Usha Srikant classified embroidery in four types-Court embroidery, Trade embroidery, Folk embroidery, Temple embroidery.² These embroideries are practiced in different forms in Indian state including

- Phulkari of Punjab
- Kantha of Bengal
- Zalakdozi ,Kashida and Sozani of Jammu & Kashmir,
- Chikankari and Zardozi of Uttar Pradesh
- Kasuti of Karnataka
- Gota Patti of Rajasthan
- Mochibharat, Kathiawar and Sindhi of Gujarat

II. What is Zardozi?

Each embroidery has different history and style. Among the all above embroideries the most important seems to be the gold and silver embroidery which later known as Zardozi. A magnificent metallic and Persian embroidery is made up with two term 'Zar' meaning gold 'Dozi' meaning embroidery. It is called 'ShahiKaam' in Mughal Period. This metal embroidery that uses pure gold silver wire. Pure gold was beaten into fine metal wire (thread) that was used to embroider motifs on silk, satin and velvet. This would be further enhanced with the addition of precious gems such as diamonds, emeralds, and pearls, which would be sewn into the fabric as part of the embroidery. A number of different decorative stuff are used with this art as Kalabattu (The twisted gold plated thread), Salma (Very thin twisted metal wire), sitara(A small round piece), tilli(Sequins), kora(Dull zari thread), tikora (A gold thread spirally twisted), chikna (lustrous zari thread), gijai (a circular thin stiff wire used for outlines), and kasab (silver or gold-plated silver thread).Zardozi which is

commonly known as salmasitarekakam. The basic required equipments for Zardozi are a rectangular wooden or metal frame fixed on the ground also known as Karchob, and needle. Cloth to be embroidered is tightly fixed on this frame. So craftsman do work on the ground with same sitting posture for 8 to 12 hours continuously. This sitting timing is called 'nafri'. One narfi is equal to 8 hours. This craft is basically done by Muslim community in all over India since medieval period. The important zardozi centers of India are Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Bareilly, Banaras, Hyderabad, Jodhpur, Jaipur and Kolkata.³ But among all the centers only Zardozi of Lucknow got 'Geographical Identification Registration'.⁴ A geographical indication is a name or sign used on products which corresponds to a specific geographical location or origin under Intellectual Property India.



Figure 1 : Cape made with Zardozi work

III. Historical development of Zardozi Craft

When we trace historical development of this craft. The oldest documentary evidence of this art might have been found in Vedic age. In Vedic Period, Gold has been used in fabric decoration in a variety of ways; painting the fabric with gold and silver pigment, decorating the fabric with embroidery and appliqué, weaving variegated patterns luxurious with gold or silver given in so on. *Rig Veda* mentioned some words *atka*, *drapi*, *pesas* indicating sewn garments.⁵ The term *atka* means a garment embroidered with gold thread. It was known as cloth of gold. Same as P.C. Roy highlighted in *Mahabharat* the king of Kamboja presented Yudhishtara with many kinds of animal skins and woolen blankets(woolen clothes) embroidered with thread of gold.⁶ In Valmiki's *Ramayana* there are many evidence of gold thread work. Epic speaks about *Maharajatvasas* the clothes embroidered with gold and silver thread. These references indicate beyond doubt that gold silver thread work on costumes was part of opulent tradition during epic period. There are some more evidences given in other texts like *Jatakas*,⁷ where golden turbans and trappings for elephants were made with gold work. Jain literatures *Acharanga Sutra*⁸ and Ajanta Painting cave no XVII, there are some depiction of embroidered clothes.⁹ Descriptions found in Banabhatta's *Harshacharita* where dazzling muslin robe embroidered with gold thread.¹⁰ Same as embroidery with golden thread found in Gupta and Kushana period too.

But the full fledged form of zardozi came to India by Turkish in Tughlak dynasty. During the reign of Mohammad Bin Tughlak, zardozi became popular embroidery of royal costumes and courtly nobles. Ibanbatuta and Amir Khusro also give some description in their writings. Batuta described Nauroz celebration by Kaikubad where dresses, draperies, parasol, curtains were embedded with gold.¹¹ The word Zardozi first time appeared in *Futuh-i- Firozshahi*, the autobiography of Firozshah Tughlak.¹² This literature gave description of dresses embroidered with zardozi. Firozshah Tughlak imposed rules and restrictions on this work and also restricted designs and patterns according to shariyet. This action gave set back to zardozi during his times. During the 16th century zardozi craft reached in Vijaya Nagar empire under the Hindu king Krishnadev Rai and Achyuta Rai.

But Mughal period gave a new zenith to zardozi. In mughal period all the royal costumes were made by this work. A new trend of Court karkhana culture was set up in Delhi and Agra. Craftsmen from different parts of country came here to practice under the patronage of Mughal emperor Akbar. AbulFazal mentioned shawl embroidered with zardozi in *Ain-e- Akbari*.¹³ Typical taste of groups of patrons brought variation in forms and styles. The royalty and nobility were richly represented attired in gold and jewels as well horses, elephants, and camels were depicted with richly embroidered saddles.

During the regime of Jahangir, in his memoirs *Tuzuk- i-Jahangiri* mentions decorative robes with gold embroidery. the dominance of this craft continued in the period of Shahjahan. But Under the rule of Aurangzeb, the royal patronage stopped and this led to the decline of the art. During the 18th century, the art suffered. The local artisans who were learning skills in the factory known as 'Tiraj' migrated to Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Rajasthan, Mysore and many artisans were recruited by Rajput rajas. This was the time when new political divisions had developed by local rulers like Awadh, Nizam and Bengal. so these artisans found shelter in provincial courts. This gave a boost to zardozi craft and artisans. Agra, Jaipur, Lucknow, Delhi, Benares, Jodhpur, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Bareilly are the hubs for original handmade zardozi.

Awadh is one of them, ruled by Nawabs of Awadh from 1722AD to 1856AD. Nawabs of Awadh followed mughal court culture in their royal attires. With the migration of artisans in Lucknow, this royal craft came to Lucknow court and became the part of royal costumes of nawabs. NawabShujaudaula took interest in handicrafts. He patronage arts in his court. When most of the north Indian politics suffering from difficulties at that time Awadh was the only state who devoted its time for the promotion of handicrafts and industries. NawabAsaf al-Daulah followed the policy of his father. He awarded land grants to many artisans. Soon after Lucknow became the main centre for decorative made of zardozi. Hoey mentioned that it is difficult to say by which time this royal craft came to Lucknow, but it can be said that in the region of Asaf –ud-daulazardozi became a part of Awadhi culture.¹⁴ He also mentioned that zardozi of Lucknow was better than other centers in north India. Lucknow is famous for heavy zardozi embroidery. Basically this art was done on velvet, silk and satin fabrics with the help of needle on wooden frame called ‘Adda’. Motifs and flowers, birds, animals and fruits, borders were common designs. Blue and purple velvet fabric were favorite among royal court and nobles. zardozi artisans was known as Zardoz. Initially this work was done in Riyasatikarkhanaspatronaged by royal court and nobles.

During nawabs times so many articles made of zardozi were in demand by the royal families and nobles such as costumes(Male & female), Shoes, Carpet, Covers, Canopies, Saddle, Tent, Kanat, Curtains, Uniforms, religious Symbols (Calligraphy on fabrics in Mohharram) Caps, Sheath etc. It was famous for its neatness and cleanness.¹⁵C.W. Gywanne said that in 19th century Lucknow became main centre of this beautiful craft.¹⁶Contemporary writer Abdul Halim Sharar mentioned this craft with the demand of Pashmina Shawl embroidered with zardozi in winter.

Sir Birdwood said Nawabs were very particular about their attires. So they took interest in their costumes and accessories.¹⁷ Portraits of nawabs of Awadh give a glimpse of this craft which are preserved in State Museum Lucknow, Amirudaula library Lucknow and Taluqadar hall Lucknow. Not only attires but caps and shoes wore by nawabs and nobles (both male and female) were also made of zardozi work. Contemporary writer Abdul Halim Sharar gives a list of shoes named Khurdnok, Charwan, Aram Pai, Konsh, ZarPai, Zuftpai Salim Shahi, Boot and Peshawari. He also mentioned that cord of Hukkas were also decorated with this work.¹⁸ He mentioned this craft with the demand of Pashmina Shawl embroidered with zardozi in winter.¹⁹

After 1857 this craft got immense popularity among common mass because the court culture of Awadh ended, so all the court embroideries including Chikankari and Zardozi used to practiced by local Karkhandars especially in Chauk and Hussainabad Area. Soon Domestic Karkhana culture emerged in Lucknow. Owner of the karkhana was known as Karkhandars. A report on industrial survey of the united provinces, Lucknow in 1923 gives a list of some famous Karkhanas in Lucknow.²⁰

- Tazdar Mirza, Victoria Street
- Hadi Hussain Kholki Bazar
- Amanat Ali, Sadatganj, Chauk
- Mohammad Hussain, Kataritola
- Nasir Hussain, Asrafabad

Main areas famous for this work were Purana Lucknow including Chauk, Hussainabad, Nakkhas. This work was very costly at that time so only royal, nobles and administrators only could afford it. This can be understand by the official report on International Exhibition held in 1883-84 in Calcutta, where so many articles made of zardozi from Lucknow displayed including Caps, coat, saddle from Chauk seller.²¹ Cost of these items were from Rs.200 to 300.

IV. European Influence on the Craft

During British time European influence can be seen in this work. Even nawabs followed western dressing sense in their costumes with European style and designs. European also very fond of this work especially Portuguese. Birdwood believes that the lavish gold scroll ornamentation so popular on canopies, Chhatar, elephant Draperies, horse coverings, state housing and caparisons were designs of Italian origin of the 16th century. Portuguese sent satin to India to be embroidered in Italian designs. These influenced the work of Gulbarga, Ahemdabad and Hyderabad as well as of Lucknow at a later period.²²They used to send fabrics to be embroidered with this work. This work received much patronage in nawabs time and practiced in British period.

V. Present Scenario

But at present this traditional craft is not getting proper attention. Still more than 2 laczardoz working on this in LucknowDistrict. But their condition is very pathetic. They are not getting enough wages. As I went to field work and I found that most of the zardoz are not satisfied with the money they receive. They said we work continuously in sitting posture for 8 hours called ‘Nafri’. And received only Rs.150 to 200 per day. Monthly income is not more than 5000. It is very difficult to run home with this very little amount. There is gender discrimination on the distribution of wages also. Female zardoz receive less money while working hours are equal. They also faced medical issues like eye disease, back pain, neck pain. So they are compel to leave this work. When I went on field visit in karkhana in hussainabad asked zardozto provide some information of this craft and their condition, they denied and said you people only collect information. Nobody actual care for us. we don’t want to share any information with you. As I asked them about government help and policies for the development of craft and

artisans. Most of them were not aware of them because of illiteracy. While government introduced medical policies, loan, training program, and other plan for them under Handicraft Promotional Schemes by Ministry of Textiles(Handicraft) at Centre and State level both. But artisan are receiving very less amount of these benefits provided by the government.

In Domestic and International markets demand of zardozi is increasing . Gulf countries, North and South America, are the main markets where zardozi craft of Lucknow are always in demands in various articles. Even in fashion industry renowned fashion designers like Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Anamika Khanna, RituKumar use zardozi work in their Bridal costumes.

VI. Conclusion

In Lucknow this traditional craft has a great social and cultural significance as Chikankari. These craft are the part of heritage. Both are contemporary craft during nawabs time. Historically and Culturally, this royal craft has received equal patronage like Chikankari. But Chikankari is more popular than zardozi due to more attention, promotion and marketing . At present the craft and artisans both are facing various problem including lack of government attention, exploitation of Karkhandars and Middle man, and wages. Many artisans have started to switch their profession due to less wages and poor facilities provided by karkhandars .To sum up it may concluded that zardozi is very popular embroidery being exploited to great extent and needs much attention from government and non government agencies to survive, so that this beautiful traditional craft may get new opportunities.



Figure2 : Zardozi working in Karkhana

¹Jamila Brijbhusham , The Costumes and Textiles of India, Bombay: Taraporevala sons & co., 1958,p. 50.

²Usha, Srikant, Ethnic Embroidery of India, Part II, Pune: Mrs. Usha Shrikant,2009,p.16.

³Surabhi, Mahajan, The glittering embroidery Zardozi and the Zardozi, Germany :Lambert Academic Publishing, ,2012,p.4.

⁴Geographical Indications Journal No. 49 , Government Of India ,November 30, 2012,p.3.

⁵Friedrich, Max Muller, Rig Veda Samhita The sacred Hymns of The Brahmins , Vol-2, London: Oxford University Press 1890, p.348.

⁶P.C., Roy, The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, Vol-2, Calcutta :Oriental Publishing Co., 1887,p.114-115.

⁷E.B., Cowell, The Jatakas or stories of Buddha's Former birth, Vol 1-7, Cambridge : The University Press, 1905, p.252.

⁸Kanakakhachiya was a cloth ornamented with golden thread.

H., Jacobi, Gaina Sutra, Oxford :The Clarendon Press, ,1864,p.158.

⁹Herringham, Ajanta Frescoes, London :Oxford University Press, 1915, Pl.XXXVI.

¹⁰E.B., Cowell, F.W., Thomas, The Harshacharita of Bana, London : Royal Asiatic Society, 1897, p.242.

¹¹Mabdi, Husain, The Rehla of Ibn Battuta, Baroda: Sadhana Press, 1953,p.58.

¹²H., Omar, Futuhat -i- Firuzshahi, Aligarh:1957,p.21.

¹³Henry ,Blochmann, The Ain I Akbari, by AbulFazal, Calcutta Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873, p.93-94.

¹⁴Hoey, William, A Monograph on Trade and Manufactures in Northern India, Lucknow, 1879-80, Lucknow: American Methodist Mission Press, 1880, p. 196.

¹⁵W.C. Benett, Gazetteer of the Provinces of Oudh Vol I, Lucknow: Oudh Government Press, 1877, p. XVII.

¹⁶C.W., Gywanne , A Monograph on the manufacture of Wire and Tinsel in the United Provinces, Allahabad: Government Press, 1910, p.7.

¹⁷George, Birdwood, The Industrial arts of India, London : Chapman and Hall, 1880,p.230.

¹⁸Abdul Halim, Sharar, Guzishtha Lucknow, Lucknow:AlwaizSafdar Press, p.386.

¹⁹Ibid, p.385.

²⁰A report on Industrial survey of the United Provinces, Allahabad :Government Press, 1923.p.31.

²¹ Official Report on International Exhibition held in 1883-84 in Calcutta, Vol 2, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat ,1885, p.388-395.

²²George, Birdwood, The Industrial arts of India, London: Chapman and Hall, 1880,p.368.